

The Life Of The World To Come.

Text: John 17:3

Suggested Hymns:

379, 403, 763T515, 284, 210

1) Winning the life

2) Living the life

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 17:3, ³ ***“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we conclude our series on the Nicene Creed. The final part, part 17 focuses on the words, *I look for ... the life of the world to come.*

Many people have given a precious part of their lives in winning one of the two world wars last century. We remember the sacrifices people make in all wars on ANZAC Day.

Other people, although not directly involved in the wars, have had their lives radically affected because of loved ones who went away and returned, and also of those who did not return.

There was no questioning throughout the period of either war that there was a struggle, not just to ensure democracy but to regain peace in the world.

To have peace among all nations is a hope that is quite universally cherished. Peace is important. It is desirable. It is worth working for. It is worth fighting for.

However, for us as Christians there is something far more important, and even much more desirable. That is eternal life, as we confess in the Nicene Creed: *I look for the life of the world to come.*

Sometimes we say that we should be able to tell a Christian apart from other people in the world. This should be easy to do. We should be able to

characterise a Christian by the way he talks and lives. We should be able to characterise a Christian, for instance, by his stance — the stance of the person looking *for the life of the world to come*.

God describes this stance in Scripture in many ways and in many passages. Today we shall look at it from two angles: Winning the Life — the life of the world to come — and Living the Life. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Winning The Life

Winning the Life, like winning the world wars, involves a battle and a victory. But here is precisely the point at which so many people have gone astray. They make this their battle and their victory, whereas in reality it is not. It is God's battle and God's victory.

Many people, including each of us at certain times, fear death. There is a fear of ending our existence, a fear of coming to the point when we shall no longer be with our loved ones, a fear that trembles at the prospect of the unknown that exists on the other side of the grave. Just what will happen when we breathe our last breath?

Some people think that we live and die and there is no more, but most people inherently know that there is a life after death and cherish the hope that there is more to themselves than this world's troubles and pleasures.

But fear of the black unknown, tinted by the flaming sparks of hell, about which some have heard faintly and others more grimly, perhaps in an early exposure to fire-and-brimstone preaching, causes some people to view their life as an attempt to satisfy an angry God and to avoid the temptations of Satan.

Therefore their life becomes one long struggle hoping that God will approve of their behaviour or at least look with favour on their good intentions.

We see these people all around us, some people are struggling with inner torments, others with external evidences of fighting guilt in their lives, and still others who have developed a tough callus over their heart and soul, but all people are struggling against the powers of Satan.

We all know well with St. Paul, as we read in Romans 7:19, ¹⁹ *For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice*. But people live on, some with an outward pose of supreme confidence, some in

despair, almost hoping against hope, and others almost daring the Lord of the heavens that their good life is good enough.

And so they continue living — they make fun cheerfully, but they struggle inwardly, they fight on — but they do it alone. There are some people who would call this a wonderful picture of the independent spirit of the human being fashioning his own destiny, but really it's a very sorrowful picture.

To think of people trying to satisfy a God who says in Matthew 5:48 ⁴⁸ *“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect* — and to know that *there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin,*¹ and that *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*² - to think of people trying to fulfil the perfection demanded by God — this is an extremely sad picture.

Why is it that everyone cannot understand that God has loved us so much that He fought this battle for us? Cannot everyone read in the Bible that God sent His son to die for us, to fight the battle and win it for us?

But be patient. It is not easy to read and accept. It is not easy to recognise that we proud human beings have nothing to be proud about in terms of our own achievements and efforts. It is not easy to understand and accept what goes beyond human love, what goes beyond human reason. It is not easy for us human beings simply to let God be God.

But God He was, and God He is. The battle was fought and won. ⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ* writes St. Paul.³ *“Death is swallowed up in victory!”* he cries out.⁴ Scripture says in Romans 6:23 that *the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* The victory results in eternal life for us.

The victory, however, was accomplished alone by and through Jesus Christ, God's Son. For it was Jesus who lived the perfect life on earth for us. It was Jesus who ascended Calvary to suffer and die on the cross in our stead. It was Jesus who bore the punishment we deserve because of our sins.

It was Jesus who descended into hell and conquered Satan as well. It was Jesus who triumphed over the grave by rising from the dead, thus portraying the resurrection we shall experience and assuring the gift of eternal life for us.

Eternal life, the life of the world to come, heaven — these are now promised to us by God. Remember that Jesus told His disciples, as He tells you and me too, as written in John 14:2, ² ***“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”*** This is God’s heaven and ours as well.

In Heaven we shall be free of tears and troubles and pain. We read in Revelation 21:4, ⁴ ***“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”***

In Heaven we shall be free of sin, be free of the anxiety that creeps into our life and encompasses our whole body and our whole environment. We shall come into ***“an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,”*** as God reminds us 1 Peter 1:4.

In Heaven we shall be free of death, ⁵³ ***“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality”*** we are assured in 1 Cor. 15:53.

In Heaven we shall sing and rejoice. ¹⁰ ***“And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, And come to Zion with singing, With everlasting joy on their heads,”*** we read in Isaiah 35:10.

In Heaven we shall see God. ***“And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, ²⁷ Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”*** we learn from Job 19:26.

Although heaven is a place unseen by human eyes and unimaginable to human minds, we have seen that God gives us some pictures of it and of its joy in His Word, the Bible. It speaks of marriage,⁵ a banquet, sitting upon thrones,⁶ a house of many mansions,⁷ and the heavenly Jerusalem.⁸ All of these terms set forth the surpassing beauty of heaven.

This side of the stance of the Christian looking *for the life of the world to come* — Winning the Life, or really, having won the life — may be illustrated by the story of the little four-year-old boy whose mother, recently widowed, was watching him play through her kitchen window.

She happened to look down for a moment, and when she looked up again, she saw he had gone out into the street. She immediately called to him to return to the yard and stay there. The next day she looked down again, and Johnny wandered out into the street. She hurried out, brought him back, and in frightening tones warned him about the dangers of the street.

When the very same thing happened the third day, the mother, much more distraught, rushed out, brought the boy back, set him down in the middle of the yard, and said: “*Johnny, why do you go out into the street? Don’t you know that you may get killed?*”

Johnny looked up at his mother and spoke quietly but in rather questioning words: “*But Mummy, I want to go see Daddy.*”

The Christian displays a similar confidence in looking *for the life of the world to come*. He stands confidently, boldly, assuredly, resting firmly on God’s Word and His promises in that Word. He relies solidly on his faith in Jesus Christ as his Saviour and expects without any doubt that heaven is his because God has said so.

2. Living The Life

Yet it is true that a child-like faith may sometimes overlook, perhaps fortunately at times, the realities and necessities of our day-to-day living. Living the Life is the other side of the stance of the Christian looking *for the life of the world to come*. Living the Life, just like winning the peace in these days, involves a continuous struggle.

Some people might feel this has no place in the picture of the person looking *for the life of the world to come* — that there are really two distinct and separate lives, the one here on earth and the other, eternal life, to be assumed after death, the life hereafter.

But remember, what Jesus says in John 17:3, ³ “***And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.***” Eternal life is inextricably and definitely connected with our faith and earthly life here and now. It is not bound and restricted by the time of our death, set to begin only at that point.

It begins with knowing Jesus as ***“the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”***⁹ For many of us this began already in the first weeks of our life at the time of our baptism. It exists now in what we call our spiritual life.

Eternal life is in the present tense, meaning that we have it now as we read in 1 John 5:12, ¹² ***He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. “He who has the Son” — and we have Him and know Him as our Saviour and God now.***

Likewise, St. Paul could say to the Colossians, and to us too, ⁶ ***For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.***¹⁰ We have no more to do with putting earthly desires and pleasures first. Our spiritual life here and now is wrapped up, and bound up with Christ.

And Jesus related this in His parable of the Good Shepherd. We read in John 10:10, ***I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.***

Knowing Christ as our Saviour gives us a spiritual life that enlightens our earthly existence. That life is reflected in our total behaviour.

It is, in a sense, a foretaste of the life to come, but a life we are actually living in part now, for it means living for Christ, living with Him as the centre and focus of our whole existence — a reality that will reach its fullness in heaven itself.

We see this as a victorious life we are living as Christians now. We recognise this, even though, day after day we come face to face with problems and struggles in which we battle against the powers of Satan. But we know too that the world and all that is in it has been conquered. We read in 1 John 5:4, ⁴ ***For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world -- our faith.***

Jesus promised His disciples, and He brings the same comfort to you and me: ***“In the world you shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”***¹¹

But how can this be such an all-victorious life if you and I, as soon as this sermon and Worship Service are ended, fall prey to the devil’s temptations and

start judging other people, thinking that we are just a little better than he or she is?

How can you and I be such full-fledged men and women of God — men and women who have eternal life and have our life hid in Christ, who *look for the life of the world to come* and are living it here and now — but give ourselves up already this afternoon to those sinful thoughts we hate so desperately, and yet perhaps so secretly enjoy?

This is the paradox of the Christian here on earth, is it not? Saint and sinner — given to sin and temptation to sin, yet a redeemed child of God, with God's Spirit living in our soul and guiding our life.

We are not yet fully a part of that life to come, but we are living in it and with it now. Our citizenship in heaven is not fully mature. There is no doubt about our ownership of heaven in the promises God has given us, but we still are, as it were, only beginning citizens. We are only beginning to appreciate our privileges.

Remember what 1 John 3:2 says, ² ***Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.***

The other side of the stance of the Christian looking *for the life of the world to come* — Living the Life — is one of joyful living, living for God, putting Christ at the centre of all of our life and behaviour.

It is experiencing in part already the life which God gives us and still looking forward to the ultimate in joy when we shall be like Christ Himself, when we shall see Him as He is.

But now let us put the two sides of the Christian's stance together — Winning the Life and Living the Life. What happens if we lean more towards one side than the other?

What happens, for example, if we lean more toward the side of Winning the Life, that is, as we understand it, of having won the life? The person who thinks almost solely of having won the life may consider his time here on earth as only so many wasted hours.

After all, eternal life is won, and there is nothing else required of him until he dies. He may therefore tend to think little of this life while he is waiting for death and may not appreciate the joy which God intends him to have here in his time on earth.

And what if we lean too far toward the side of Living the Life? Such a person may be tempted to have too much concern for the things of this life. He may come to think too highly of himself and of his own achievements. He may then neglect the solid promises of God, which speak of the fullness of joy that is his after death, a far greater joy than any he will ever have here on earth.

The Christian must have a balanced stance in looking *for the life of the world to come*, not leaning too far to the one side or the other. He will be confident, boldly trusting in God and relying on His promises that heaven is his.

Yet he will also be a happy person, living his life to the fullest as God gives him the strength to do His will, and looking forward to the full life of joy and triumph when he will be with his Saviour and God in heaven.

May God grant each of you the balanced stance of the Christian looking *for the life of the world to come*. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Ecclesiastes 7:20

² Romans 3:23

³ 1 Corinthians 15:57

⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:54

⁵ Matthew 22:1-10, also 25:10, Revelation 19:9

⁶ Luke 22:30

⁷ John 14:2

⁸ Rev 21:10-27

⁹ John 14:6

¹⁰ Colossians 3:3

¹¹ John 16:33